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ABSTRACT

West Virginia University provides on-the-job practicum experience to rural special education teachers who are pursuing certification while working on "out-of-field" permits. An important aspect of the competency-based practicum experience is evaluative feedback. Two methods of evaluative feedback were used with 22 practicum students who were teaching students with behavior disorders. In the first method, videotapes were made of participants' classroom performance. Participants later viewed their own tapes and counted the frequencies or duration of eight teaching behaviors relevant to work with behaviorally disordered students. The data were coded using a hand-held microcomputer, which computed ratios of time spent on each teaching behavior and provided printouts. In the second method, trained university personnel observed each practicum student, filled out the traditional lesson observation form, and later discussed the observation with the participant. At the completion of the practicum period, 19 of the participants completed and returned questionnaires concerning the evaluative effectiveness of the two feedback methods. The video method had higher average ratings than the outside observer method on 11 of 13 questions concerned with objectivity, efficiency, and teaching effectiveness. Nine participants who clearly preferred the video method cited its ability to enhance self-evaluation and awareness of one's own teaching behaviors and to provide specific information about performance. Five participants who clearly preferred the traditional method liked the personal interaction and opportunity to discuss problems and solutions. Five participants indicated that a combination of the two methods was most effective. (SV)

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A COMPARISON OF METHODS FOR PROVIDING EVALUATIVE FEEDBACK TO PRACTICUM STUDENTS ON SEGMENTS OF TEACHING DURING SPECIAL EDUCATION PRACTICUM IN RURAL AREAS

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the status and quality of teaching has been scrutinized from many perspectives. Since A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) emphasized the need for educational reform, at least half a dozen subsequent reports, including A Nation Prepared (Carnegie Task Force, 1986) and Tomorrow's Teachers (The Holmes Group, 1986) have called the dramatic changes in America's classrooms and teacher training programs. While these reports address educational problems in general, the concerns expressed arerelevant to special education.

In the past, teacher education has often been based on an embarrassing assumption: that verbalized knowledge was a condition for effective teaching (Schwartz and Oseroff, 1975). However, the movement to competency based teacher education (CBTE) has led educators away from dependence on paper-and-pencil testing of knowledge. Currently, CBTE provides a way to specify and define teacher competencies in teacher education programs as well as to study the relationship of the competencies to student achievement. (Gagne, 1970).

Research indicates that more extensive preservice practicum experiences are associated with a greater number of superior teachers (Fredericks, Anderson, and Baldwin, 1977). Thus the importance of evaluative feedback during a competency based practicum experience is noted. This critical period of teacher training epitomizes the competency based teacher education movement and maximizes applied learning potential in teacher trainees.

Criticism and controversy surround the role of classroom observation in the supervision of special education practicum teachers. Both supervisors, as well as practicum students, note limitations of the observation-and-conference ritual. The potential for subjectivity and distortion by both parties can create a breakdown of trust which results in defensiveness. Thus, this critical period of teacher training has lost much of its full potential. Practicum students also have different perceptions of needed competencies. When surveyed, teachers of learning disabled and mentally retarded students shared similar views of the skills and competencies that they needed, while teachers of students with behavior disorders differed in their ratings of the necessary skills and competencies (Carri, 1985). Thus, the following research was an attempt to ascertain a suitable evaluative feedback tool which would give BD teachers personal insights concerning their teaching performance.

A growing number of researchers use state-of-the-art portable and laptop computers to collect, store, and analyze observational data (Reith, Polsgrove, Okolo, Bahr, & Eckert, 1987). The use of portable microcomputers has also been used to collect teacher behavior data (Reith, Haus, Bahr, 1989). This technology which allows the teacher and practicum supervisor to handle information more efficiently, adequately, and objectively was incorporated into this research.

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Due to a shortage of certified special education teachers, West Virginia fills a high percentage of positions in behavior disorders with teachers holding only out-of-field teaching permits. The number of teaching permits issued in West Virginia for the 1988-1989 school year totaled 302 in the area of Behavior Disorders. This represents approximately 80% of all such teachers in the state, a percentage which has remained stable while the actual number of teachers has increased. A training program which directly impacted the training of teachers of students with behavior disorders in West Virginia by improving practicum experiences and provided the framework for this paper.

PARTICIPANTS

Project participants were recruited and qualified if they were uncertified "permit" teachers serving students with behavior disorders. Evening classes were provided by West Virginia University Special Education Department at participants local rural sites which allowed them to meet certification requirements. On-the-job practicum experiences were conducted in the actual classroom where participants were employed. This research was conducted during this alternative certification program and took place during the second semester of coursework when participates were engaged in practicum. Twenty-two practicum teachers located in 18 rural West Virginia schools participated in this research to ascertain teacher perception of effectiveness of evaluative feedback approaches.

EVALUATIVE FEEDBACK INSTRUMENTS

A) VIDEOTAPED TEACHING SEGMENTS WITH CODING ON TEACHING BEHAVIORS DERIVED FROM HAND HELD MICROCOMPUTERS

Microteaching developed by Dwight Allen (1969) attempts to take a "picture" of teaching by lusing a videotaped record of performance. This videotaped record is recognized as a powerful way to provide teachers with feedback (Rogers, 1987). A more significant approach to instructional improvement has been noted when this videotaping is combined with objective ratios of the actual teaching behaviors (Hoover, 1984). Specifically, in this research, the videotape and microcomputer equipment are used simultaneously to record data about the teaching performance.

A teacher behavior code was created from two approaches that can be used to teach academic skills to behaviorally disordered students: direct instruction, and it's off shoot, opportunity to respond. Direct instruction grew out of the work of two groups of researchers, one working on compensatory education (Becker, Engelmann, Carnine & Rhine, 1982), and the other on teacher effectiveness (Rosenshine, 1976). Although neither of these efforts directly focused specifically on the academic needs of behaviorally disordered students, both approaches are well suited for use with these students, many of whom require compensatory education and effective teaching to improve their academic functioning to grade level (Strain, Cooke, & Appoloni, 1976).

Duration counts were taken regarding the following teacher behaviors: transition, introduction, direct instruction, guided practice, independent work, evaluation. Frequency counts were taken regarding positive and negative feedback given by the teacher to the students. A brief definition for each of these teaching behaviors is given in TABLE I. The skills and knowledge required to use these two tools in combination require only a few hours of training in a group setting workshop session. Participants then viewed samples of their teaching performance and coded their video tapes using the hand-held microcomputers' coding system. Print-outs were then available allowing participants to actually compute ratios of time spent on each of the above mentioned teaching behaviors, as well as frequency counts noting the number of positive and negative responses made to students in their class setting.

TABLE I
BEHAVIOR CODING DEFINITIONS

Transition - Students are between lessons or activities and are not engaged in any type of activity or instruction. Time spent taking role, getting in line, etc. are all counted as transition.

Introduction - Time spent by the teacher introducing a lesson, providing an advance organizer, stating the objectives/purpose of the lesson or the activities to come.

Direct Instruction - Time spent in teaching a new skill or reviewing a skill. The teacher demonstrates, models, explains concepts, students ask questions, listen, respond to teacher questions.

Guided Practice - The teachers assist students in practicing the skill. The students are engaged in doing problem/activity with the teacher. May include group practice (choral and random student responding to teacher questions), students completing individual tasks (e.g., problems on the board) while the teacher monitors and provides assistance.

Independent Work - Students are engaged in independent drill and practice work activities, such as work sheets, work from the board, etc.

Evaluation - Student and teacher engaged in activity geared to evaluate the outcome of a lesson or to measure student progress toward a goal (e.g., curriculum based assessment, classroom quizzes or tests).

Positive Feedback - Each time the teacher responds to an appropriate behavior or response with a positive comment or praise.

Negative Feedback - Each time a teacher calls attention to an inappropriate behavior or response by making a negative comment.

B) WRITTEN OBSERVATION EVALUATION OBTAINED BY TRAINED PERSONNEL.

A traditional observation-and-conference ritual was also used as an evaluative feedback technique. Trained personnel would schedule "observations" with the practicum students and then use a lesson observation form adopted by West Virginia University Special Education Department to document the observation. Observers are asked and trained to observe facts not judgements about teaching performance. The observer then discussed the observation with the practicum student following the lesson. The lesson observation form contains the following preteaching, teaching, post-teaching and conference note components: PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION, INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS, CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT, TEACHING METHODS, BEHAVIORAL MANAGEMENT, MOTIVATION AND RAPPORT, EVALUATION, PUPIL RESPONSE, STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND SUGGESTIONS.

The reader should note that these methods differ with respect to the person who is the observer. In the videotaped/microcomputer method, the actual practicum student "observes,"

whereas in the traditional written observation method, an "outsider" makes the evaluation write up.

PROCEDURES

The twenty-two participants in the Rural BD Project were asked to answer a questionnaire upon the completion of their practicum experience. Questionnaires were mailed to participants after they had finished all coursework, observations, classroom assignments and exit interviews with co-operating teachers and university supervisors . Data was collected anonymously and 19 of the 22 respondents returned their instruments.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. Parts I and II contained 13 identical statements which probed for objectivity, efficiency, teaching effectiveness, and self evaluation of teaching behaviors regarding the evaluative effectiveness of videotaped teaching segments and the written evaluative feed back, respectively. Participants rated the effectiveness of each method using a Likert scale format of 1-5 ranging from not effective to most effective.

Section III required participants to indicate their choice of which method, video or written feedback, was most effective and to elaborate on the following statements:

1. I feel this method was best because.....
2. If I could change one or two things in the system, I would.....
3. Describe the most significant change resulting from the video/computer feedback.
4. Describe the most significant change resulting from feedback received from the traditional written evaluation with feedback.
5. What change would you rank as most significant in improving your effectiveness as a teacher?

FINDINGS

The average scores for all of the items in Section I (video/computer) were higher (11) or equal to (2) the same statements in Section II (written feedback) except for "provides information which increases awareness of own teaching style." This item received a 3.7 rating on Section I and a 3.8 on Section II. The highest rated statement for Section I was "provides means for students to assess his/her own behavior," while the highest rated assessment for Section II (written feedback) was "provides a means for objective assessment of teaching behavior."

All of the statements averaged 3.0 or above for both sections with the exception of "provides information to increase awareness of individual behavior dynamics in the classroom " (2.9). The statement, which rated equally for both sections, were "provides information which may heighten awareness of teaching activities," and "provides information regarding the effectiveness of teaching behaviors in the classrooms."

The lowest rated statement for Section I (video/computer) was "provides information to increase awareness of group behavior dynamics" (3.4) while the lowest rated statement for Section II (written feedback) was "provides information to increase awareness of individual behavior dynamics in the classroom." (2.9).

In Section III, nine participants rated the video/computer feedback as most effective, five participants indicated written feedback was most effective, and five participants wrote in "combination" of the two methods was most effective. This response was not a choice option on the questionnaire, but was an unsolicited addition by the respondents.

The major themes which emerged from those responses indicating video/computer feedback as the most effective were the enhanced concept of self evaluation, awareness of own teaching be-

haviors, and the ability to subsequently modify these behaviors. Responses reflected the video/computer method's positive aspects of objectivity and concrete information. In addition, respondents felt that the video/computer feedback method allowed for gaining specific information about teaching behavior, such as amount of time spent on different teaching tasks as well as actual frequency counts of positive and negative feedback given to students.

Reasons given for choosing the traditional written feedback methods as most effective included the personal component of interacting with a real person and the immediate sharing of new ideas and methods. Respondents who chose this method indicated there were more opportunities to discuss concerns and problems. In addition, participants felt that evaluators could see the total classroom picture and use this information in making comments.

Participants who wrote in the combination of video/computer and written feedback as their choice for the most effective method of evaluation indicated the complimentary nature of both methods as the reason for their choice. Participants expressed the view that both methods were valuable for different reasons and each one made up for the shortcomings of the other. Respondents wrote that the video/computer methods strength was in the means it provided for self awareness and critique, while the traditional written method was useful for development of new ideas and suggestions from other sources. The objectivity/concrete aspect of the video/computer sampling and coding of teaching behavior compensated for the subjectivity nature of the personal written observation evaluations.

The responses to what might be changed in the system centered around the desire for more time and conferencing spent with evaluators. The opportunity to visit other practicum sites to compare methods and situations was noted as a suggestion to further enhance the methods for evaluation.

In describing the most significant change resulting from video/computer feedback, participants mentioned increased awareness of teaching behaviors, including the amount of time spent on the various teaching activities and interactions, as well as the amount of positive and negative feedback given in their classrooms. Respondents said this awareness allowed them to increase direct instructional teaching time, to become organized and more motivated, and willing to make constructive changes in their teaching behaviors.

The most significant changes resulting from traditional written feedback were reinforcement and encouragement given by another person, as well as suggestions and new ideas which were provided to facilitate changes in methods, instructional and behavioral programming. Heightened awareness of teaching behavior was also listed.

The change which was ranked as the most significant for improveing effectiveness as a teacher involved the benefits of videotaping in light of enhanced precision in teaching, added control, and heightened awareness for change.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Participants, when given a choice between traditional evaluations or video taping self evaluations utilizing a microcomputer to code teaching behaviors, preferred the video tape with behavior feedback option by approximately a 2 - 1 margin. One half of those participants who did not choose this option supported the technological format of evaluation as a complimentary adjunct to traditional evaluations. With the use of videotape and a microcomputer coding system, this type of evaluation strategy may easily be applied to supervision of practicum students in rural settings. This strategy has also been recommended and seems appropriate for teacher performance appraisal by local education agency personnel, and building principals (Hoover, 1984).

This "If I can see myself, I can change" concept (Rogers, 1987) also lends itself to peer review and peer discussion for collaborative problem solving. Finally, such a technique can be implemented by teachers who wish to engage in self-improvement and are not fortunate enough to have a local person with the professional capacity to assist them in their specialty area, a problem which many isolated rural special educators experience.

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